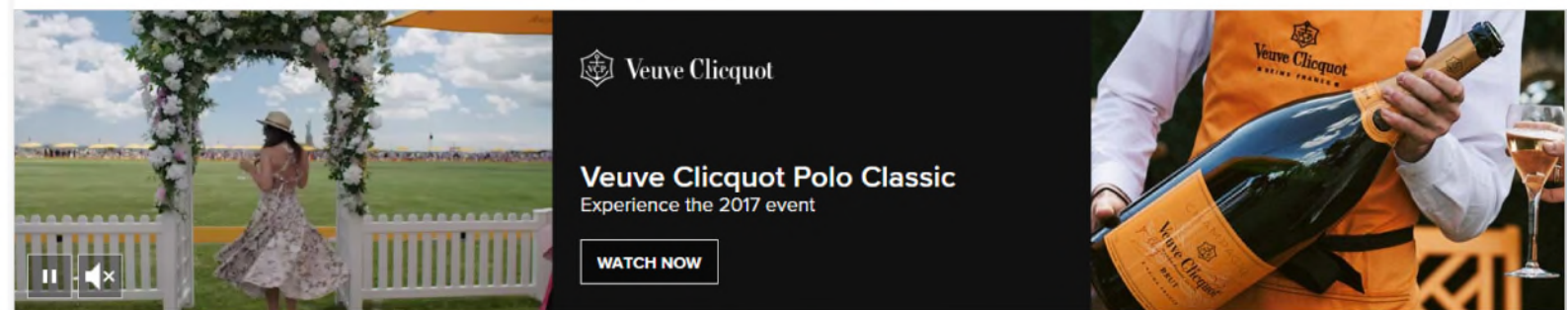



The New York Times | The Tucson Witch Hunt



The Opinion Pages | OP-ED COLUMNIST

The Tucson Witch Hunt

 **Charles M. Blow** JAN. 14, 2011

     350

Tragedy in Tucson. Six Dead. Democratic congresswoman shot in the head at rally.

Immediately after the news broke, the air became thick with conjecture, speculation and innuendo. There was a giddy, almost punch-drunk excitement on the left. The prophecy had been fulfilled: “words have consequences.” And now, the right’s rhetorical chickens had finally come home to roost.

The dots were too close and the temptation to connect them too strong. The target was a Democratic congresswoman. There was the map of her district in the cross hairs. There were her own prescient worries about overheated rhetoric.

Within hours of the shooting, there was a full-fledged witch hunt to link the shooter to the right.


“I saw Goody Proctor with the devil! Oh, I mean Jared Lee Loughner! Yes him. With the devil!”


The only problem is that there was no evidence then, and even now, that overheated rhetoric from the right had anything to do with the shooting. (In fact, a couple of people who said they knew him have described him as either [apolitical](#) or “[quite liberal](#).”) The picture emerging is of a sad and lonely soul slowly, and publicly, slipping into insanity.



Charles M. Blow

RELATED COVERAGE

 **Missing Link** JAN. 14, 2011

 **Charles M. Blow**
Politics, public opinion and social justice.

- Trump Is Circling for a Fight JUN 19
- Rhetoric and Bullets JUN 15
- The Resistance: Impeachment Anxiety JUN 12
- James Comey Cometh JUN 7
- Trump's Incredible Shrinking America JUN 5

[See More »](#)

RECENT COMMENTS

- Gary Peschell** January 15, 2011
Loughner shot Gabrielle Giffords because, it appears, she represented “government”. She was not a “random target”. Hatred of government...
- David R** January 15, 2011
While your our rational arguments are eloquently made, I feel you (as well as most of the rest of the country) actually miss the point. When...
- oh2253** January 15, 2011
This was a brave column. Let's hope that the columnist's employer and fellow columnists don't take offense. Readers who watch Fox cable news...

[SEE ALL COMMENTS](#)



EDITORIAL
The Travel Ban at the
Supreme Court



DAVID BROOKS
The G.O.P. Rejects
Conservatism



DAVID LEONHARDT
A Vote of Conscience and
Courage



THE CONVERSATION
What Do We Have a
Government for?

PAID POST: PERU
The World's Top Food
Destination Isn't What You
Think



OP-ED CONT
The Sena.
Bipartisa



Charles M. Blow
Damon Winter/The New York Times

watch Fox cable news...

SEE ALL COMMENTS

[I have written about violent rhetoric](#) before, and I'm convinced that it's poisonous to our politics, that the preponderance of it comes from the right, and that it has the potential to manifest in massacres like the one in Tucson.

But I also know that potential, possibility and even plausibility are not proof.

The American people know it, too. According to [a USA Today/Gallup poll released Wednesday](#), 42 percent of those asked said that political rhetoric was not a factor at all in the shooting, 22 percent said that it was a minor factor and 20 percent said that it was a major factor. Furthermore, most agreed that focusing on conservative rhetoric as a link in the shooting was "not a legitimate point but mostly an attempt to use the tragedy to make conservatives look bad." And nearly an equal number of people said that Republicans, the Tea Party and Democrats had all "gone too far in using inflammatory language" to criticize their opponents.

Opinion Today

Every weekday, get thought-provoking commentary from Op-Ed columnists, The Times editorial board and contributing writers from around the world.

Enter your email address

Sign Up

☒ You agree to receive occasional updates and special offers for The New York Times's products and services.

☐ I'm not a robot



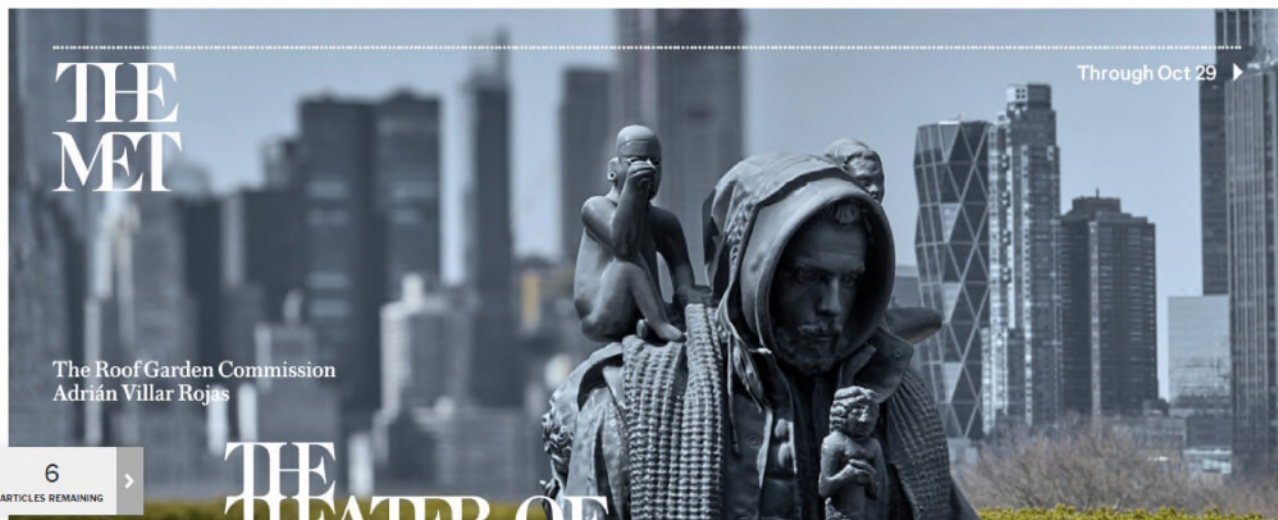
SEE SAMPLE | PRIVACY POLICY |
OPT OUT OR CONTACT US ANYTIME

Great. So the left overreacts and overreaches and it only accomplishes two things: fostering sympathy for its opponents and nurturing a false equivalence within the body politic. Well done, Democrats.

Now we've settled into the by-any-means-necessary argument: anything that gets us to focus on the rhetoric and tamp it down is a good thing. But a wrong in the service of righteousness is no less wrong, no less corrosive, no less a

menace to the very righteousness it's meant to support.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT





EDITORIAL
The Travel Ban at the
Supreme Court



DAVID BROOKS
The G.O.P. Rejects
Conservatism



DAVID LEONHARDT
A Vote of Conscience and
Courage



THE CONVERSATION
What Do We Have a
Government for?

PAID POST: PERU
The World's Top Food
Destination Isn't What You
Think



OP-ED CONTR
The Sena
Bipartisan



You can't claim the higher ground in a pit of quicksand.

Concocting connections to advance an argument actually weakens it. The argument for tonal moderation has been done a tremendous disservice by those who sought to score political points in the absence of proof.

I invite you to join me on [Facebook](#) and follow me on [Twitter](#), or e-mail me at chblow@nytimes.com.

A version of this op-ed appears in print on January 15, 2011, on Page A23 of the New York edition with the headline: The Tucson Witch Hunt. Today's Paper | [Subscribe](#)

RELATED COVERAGE

Missing Link JAN. 14, 2011



Charles M. Blow

Politics, public opinion and social justice.

Trump Is Girding for a Fight

Trump and team are attempting to defame and delegitimize the Russia investigation.



Rhetoric and Bullets
Our talk should never promote violence, but it needn't be timid.



The Resistance: Impeachment Anxiety

It's important to face the very real possibility that Trump's removal may not come.



More in Opinion

[Go to the Opinion Section »](#)



EDITORIAL

The Travel Ban at the Supreme Court



DAVID BROOKS

The G.O.P. Rejects Conservatism



PAID POST: MEXICO TOURISM

Planning a Trip to Mexico? Consider These Locations.



DAVID LEONHARDT

A Vote of Conscience and Courage



THE CONVERSATION

What Do We Have a Government for?



OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

The Senate's Secretly Bipartisan Health Bill

TRENDING

1. Senate Health Bill Reels as C.B.O. Predicts 22 Million More Uninsured
2. Op-Ed Columnist: The G.O.P. Rejects Conservatism
3. Google Fined Record \$2.7 Billion in E.U. Antitrust Ruling
4. The Interpreter: Canada's Secret to Resisting the West's Populist Wave
5. 3 CNN Journalists Resign After Retracted Story on Trump Ally
6. President Trump's Lies, the Definitive List
7. The C.B.O. Score: A Few Bright Spots for Republicans. The Rest Can Be Scored as Grim.
8. Best of Late Night: Stephen Colbert Is Not Asking the Russians to Help Him Become President
9. Op-Ed Contributor: Britain's Broken Ladder of Social Mobility
10. Republicans Struggle to Marshal Votes for Health Care Bill

[View More Trending Stories »](#)

Recommended for You

[Go to All Recommendations »](#)





EDITORIAL
The Travel Ban at the Supreme Court



DAVID BROOKS
The G.O.P. Rejects Conservatism



DAVID LEONHARDT
A Vote of Conscience and Courage



THE CONVERSATION
What Do We Have a Government for?

PAID POST: PERU
The World's Top Food Destination Isn't What You Think



OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR
The Senate Bipartisan

Trump Is Girding for a Fight

Trump and team are attempting to defame and delegitimize the Russia investigation.



Rhetoric and Bullets

Our talk should never promote violence, but it needn't be timid.



The Resistance: Impeachment Anxiety

It's important to face the very real possibility that Trump's removal may not come.

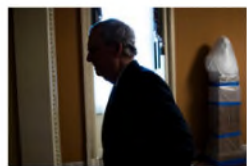


More in Opinion

[Go to the Opinion Section »](#)



EDITORIAL
The Travel Ban at the Supreme Court



DAVID BROOKS
The G.O.P. Rejects Conservatism



PAID POST: MEXICO TOURISM
Planning a Trip to Mexico? Consider These Locations.



DAVID LEONHARDT
A Vote of Conscience and Courage



THE CONVERSATION
What Do We Have a Government for?



OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR
The Senate's Secretly Bipartisan Health Bill

1. Million More Uninsured
2. Op-Ed Columnist: The G.O.P. Rejects Conservatism
3. Google Fined Record \$2.7 Billion in E.U. Antitrust Ruling
4. The Interpreter: Canada's Secret to Resisting the West's Populist Wave
5. 3 CNN Journalists Resign After Retracted Story on Trump Ally
6. President Trump's Lies, the Definitive List
7. The C.B.O. Score: A Few Bright Spots for Republicans. The Rest Can Be Scored as Grim.
8. Best of Late Night: Stephen Colbert Is Not Asking the Russians to Help Him Become President
9. Op-Ed Contributor: Britain's Broken Ladder of Social Mobility
10. Republicans Struggle to Marshal Votes for Health Care Bill

[View More Trending Stories »](#)

Recommended for You

[Go to All Recommendations »](#)



3 CNN Journalists Resign After Retracted Story on Trump Ally



Work less. You'll get so much more done.



Why You Don't Want to Have a Baby in a Car

The New York Times

[Go to Home Page »](#)

NEWS

World
U.S.
Politics
N.Y.
Business
Tech
Science
Health
Sports
Education
Obituaries
Today's Paper
Corrections

OPINION

Today's Opinion
Op-Ed Columnists
Editorials
Contributing Writers
Op-Ed Contributors
Opinionator
Letters
Sunday Review
Taking Note
Room for Debate
Public Editor
Video: Opinion

ARTS

Today's Arts
Art & Design
Books
Dance
Movies
Music
N.Y.C. Events Guide
Television
Theater
Video: Arts

LIVING

Automobiles
Crossword
Food
Education
Fashion & Style
Health
Jobs
Magazine
N.Y.C. Events Guide
Real Estate
T Magazine
Travel
Weddings & Celebrations

LISTINGS & MORE

Classifieds
Tools & Services
Times Topics
Public Editor
N.Y.C. Events Guide
Blogs
Multimedia
Photography
Video
NYT Store
Times Journeys
Subscribe
Manage My Account

SUBSCRIBE

[Home Delivery](#)
[Digital Subscriptions](#)
[Crossword](#)
Email Newsletters
Alerts
Gift Subscriptions
Corporate Subscriptions
Education Rate
Mobile Applications
Replica Edition